

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“Trinitarian Life”

John 16

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Any sermon on the Trinity must begin with a call to humility... **“God cannot be grasped,”** is the way Evagrius put it. **“If he could be grasped, he wouldn’t be God.”**

God is inexhaustible... **“incomprehensible”** say the Fathers. **“A God who is comprehensible, isn’t God.”** So if you think you’ve gotten God, by definition, you haven’t... what you have is an idol...

Fashioned by your limited mind...

With your images and probably in your image.

So... with Saints throughout the ages and with the ones at your elbow, we say, **“God is beyond us...”**

And when we speak of the nature of God – when we speak of the Trinity... we do so with great humility. Tillich said we should stutter, when we speak of God. What I can think and what I can say, by definition, falls short. But... God, this infinite one, has revealed something to us... and invited us to know it.

So we don’t look at it all and say, **“Well, it’s just a mystery and we can’t really know it.”** That word “just” is the real problem. There’s no such thing as “just” a mystery.

When we encounter a mystery...

When we are touched by mystery...

We don’t say, **“Well, how ‘bout that... it’s a mystery,”** and head off to the mall. You cannot turn from a mystery... a bush on fire but unconsumed draws you in... you’re curious and reverent... shoeless on holy ground.

It’s not just a mystery. It’s The Mystery and that doesn’t mean you can’t know it... It means it’s infinitely knowable (Richard Rohr). You can’t grasp it... control it... but it can be known.

The Trinity can be known... In fact, the mystics tell us that’s what lies at the end of the journey. We may begin in a simple sort of receptive confession... or maybe intellectual curiosity... but as we mature, there is the possibility of seeing this and more importantly... living in it... a very intimate knowing.

I heard, not long ago, about a spiritual teacher from Canada, an older gentleman, who went home to Turkey where he grew up near Mount Ararat... and he went to see and stay with some old friends... who lived in this utterly remote area... just cut off from everyone.

So, he went to see these old friends and soon after he arrived they began to show him their new treasure. Their son had purchased and sent to them, shipped from Istanbul, a very old and beautiful China cabinet.

It was a pretty substantial piece of furniture and they were so proud of it and they, of course, had all their finest things arrayed on it... displayed for all to see.

Well, the teacher was looking at it and asked them, **“What’s this for.”** It had a big sort of bulky base and so he asked them about it and they said unequivocally, **“It’s just a base... there’s nothing in it.”**

And it looked that way... no doors on the front or anything but... that didn’t seem right to the teacher, so he was curious and got to looking around it... inspecting and when he got to the back, he found a panel that could be removed and when he did, he found that it was a complete ham radio...

In other words, inside this beautiful furniture was the equipment that gave them the capacity in their remote setting to communicate with anyone in the world. That’s what the son’s gift was.

It was a way of communing.

It wasn't a china cabinet... to show off.

(from Cynthia Bourgeault)

I'm thinking that's what most of us do to the Trinity. It's sort of this antique doctrine that we're real proud of... but don't really realize all that's inside it.

We're more than happy to say during some class that, **“yes we believe in it, that somehow, Jesus is God even though we're still monotheistic”**

We'll stand and sing Trinitarian hymns...

We'll even say the Creed when Burt makes us...

Maybe even try crossing ourselves when no one's looking.

But it's hard to tell how it makes any difference in the way we live our lives. And that's a real problem because it is the heart of Christianity. It's our unique center.

And just having some doctrine we wave about is a bit like having a short wave radio that could change our lives and yet we ignore it.

And most of us would have to admit... we've ignored it or probably more accurately... been ignorant of it. We didn't mean to miss it, but we have and it's time to wake up...and here's the way I want to say it...hear this!

We need more than we've settled for.

We need to begin to know...to love God with our minds.

And to live into and from this mystery revealed.

That's what the Doctrine of the Trinity was. It was the Church's way of saying, **“What is it that has been revealed to us.”** What we have believed (Dan Brown notwithstanding) is that in creation, in history, in Israel, in the fullness of time in Jesus, in the Church... and in scripture... this is the mystery that has been revealed... it wasn't first a reasoned teaching – it was a revealed mystery.

And the name we gave it was “the Trinity.”

“God,” we said, “was one... but was also three persons.” It wasn't that God had been revealed in three different ways... it was that the divine nature was a community of being...or a being of community.

The nature of God is relational. God exists and God existed from the beginning, in relationship...in a sort of dance of mutuality and sharing. It's love actually.

God is Love and love requires others. It presupposes some thing to love...someone. There is always another, so God is God in relationship.

God is God in a total reality of love.

And love by definition must be ecstatic.

Ecstatic, it goes out...

It spills... it empties... it “proceeds” was the language the Church used. God is a reality, spilling over. **“All that belongs to the Father,”** Jesus said, **“is mine... and the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”**

Do you see this flow?

Nothing is held back?

Everything is let go of and shared.

This is what Christians believe has been revealed.

God is a great...the great sharing.

The God we know is love and holds nothing back... it's impossible. God is uncontained.

I have to tell you this story. You know Chris and Jessi's daughter, Noel, was born early Monday morning. They were hoping she would get to come last week because Chris' parents had some time off and would have been able to be here for the birth. But when Noel waited (for her pastor to return from Nashville) the Fillinghams couldn't be here.

Of course, when the labor started and they went to the hospital, Chris called his folks to tell them. And they were excited... there in Kansas City... such a long way from Noel... sitting there... waiting.

And they couldn't stand it... Chris' parents got in the car and drove 12 hours... to be here for the birth... They got here and were with Noel for an hour or so... held her and rocked her and then drove 12 hours back to be back at work.

They couldn't not be here. It wasn't in their nature, not to be here with Chris and Jessi and Noel... IMPOSSIBLE.

Here is God, we say. **“We have known a God who can't ‘not’ be here...”** What has been revealed to us is a God who proceeds – who spills – who empties... does not grasp and hold back but gives always and gives everything... The Father to the Son, the Son to the Spirit, the Spirit back to the Father.

Are you picturing this?

Someone (Cynthia Bourgeault) has said it's like one of those mechanical devices, one of those wheels, where one bucket of water is spilling into another and into another and it's creating the energy that drives everything.

Life flows from this Divine spilling...

Literally, the energy of all creation...

It spills into everything, including you.

Has too... the cross then is God being God. It's crazy to some and offensive to others but to a Christian it cannot be any other way. Love always loves and loves with complete vulnerability. That's the Trinity.

It's radical and it's beautiful... and it's more than a china cabinet at church. How can we stop just starrng at it and bragging about it and live from it? That's the question we started with, remember? If it's true that God is a Trinity then it ought to change you. Kallistos Ware said it should revolutionize our lives. How might it change you?

Just a few thoughts...

What are you holding back and from whom do you withhold it? If God is this way, then reality is this way, and we must be this way. If God is “self-emptying,” a self-protected life isn't really life. You can't withhold... and...I suspect you do.

How long, for those of you who are parents, did it take you to see that in yourselves? At first, this child is with you and they melt into you as you rock them and hold them and make so many sacrifices.

But then... they become terribly-two...

Or irritating-eight...

Or worse a teenager who stops talking to you.

When did you discover they could hurt you, maybe break your heart? When did you learn that you can hide your heart even there? Protection is the fruit of the Fall. Remember those fig leaves... “I'm too naked”...too exposed...better hide.

Those of you who've fallen in love... did it surprise you along the way, when the boundaries you thought had fallen in your romance came back? Have you married folks ever noticed that there are times when you withhold what you know your spouse needs? Have you bosses withheld a blessing along the way? How come? To remain powerful perhaps?

Our confession in the Trinity invites us to live differently because this is who God is and we can't live protected lives and expect to be in on this divine flow.

See... how the Trinity might change you? In the Trinity we see that life flows from the Three... The real power of life is always from community, from relationships. That's where the energy is. You want to be saved... and I mean by that be whole, alive... don't think you can do that with the idol trinity of "me, myself, and I." Life flows from community... eternal life. Life comes from relationship. You're cut off without it.

Hell is isolation... a person alone... consuming themselves with their own burning, self-centered passion.

It can change you and change how you do things daily. You can look at situations where there are multiple opinions and multiple perspectives, perhaps conflicting and in your Trinitarian faith says, "**I wonder what God is going to create from this diversity.**" Three is never a crowd. In Junior High someone has to get squeezed out... pushed away. That's junior high existence and it's played out everyday, everywhere...

Trinitarian life isn't that way. Three always creates improvisation. (C. Bourgeault) New things flow, so you don't have to be afraid and try to make everyone just alike. Remember... the Trinity is One but diverse. There's complete unity and perfect difference. No one gets swallowed up. The Son is the Son... see how the Trinity teaches us how to be Church. I don't have to get you to be me or to be like me.... And every immature instinct in us would like that. "Everything would just be easier if all of you would think and act like me.

I read a spiritual teacher recently saying that there are two signs of real spiritual freedom. First, I stop needing to change and control you and second, I stop worrying about what you think of me. That, by the way, is not from a pop psychologist but from an Orthodox Theologian.

Can you imagine the Spirit worrying about whether or not he's upset the Son? Can you imagine the Son trying to manipulate the Father? Trinitarian reality does not coerce... it is not anxious ... and *it is not jealous, it does not boast, it's not self-seeking, not easily angered and can never remember when it's been wronged.* ... how 'bout that?

Finally, a Trinitarian center will change you. It will because the Trinity is not static... It proceeds... or proceedeth if you prefer the poetic. The Trinity is an ongoing procession.

Any proceeding going on in your life? Are you processing? You're made for procession because you're made in God's image. It's in your DNA to be on the move. Are you? Going forth? Into new truths, new opportunities and new experiences? Are you being sent?

That's the big deal in the gospels...

The Father sent me...

I'm sending the Spirit...

I'm sending you.

... you sent?

Or has your life become settled... static... stagnant. When your Trinitary confession becomes a Trinitary existence, you won't be. Let it move beyond the lips, beyond the mind, and into your feet and hands and heart.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... Amen.